



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
LANSING

DON KOIVISTO  
DIRECTOR

January 4, 2008

Mr. Steve Henderson, Deputy Editor  
Detroit Free Press  
600 W. Fort  
Detroit MI 48226

Dear Mr. Henderson:

The Detroit Free Press article written by Mr. Steve Neavling on December 30, 2007, entitled "State lets neglect at pet stores slide" contained significant misrepresentations of the Michigan Department of Agriculture's (MDA) pet store regulatory program.

The Department responds to all complaints involving abuse or disease outbreaks of animals at a variety of licensed facilities, including pet shops, animal control agencies, animal protection shelters, and riding stables. MDA works with local law enforcement and animal welfare agencies to investigate complaints of inhumane treatment of both companion animals and livestock.

Under state law, P.A. 287 of 1969 as amended, MDA must conduct inspections of facilities wishing to obtain a license to sell cats, dogs, and ferrets. Once the license is issued, MDA requires licensed facilities to operate within the law. MDA employees investigate licensed pet shops whenever a complaint is filed.

The Detroit Free Press indicated that the state "did nothing" regarding *Pollywood Pets*, located in Mt. Clemens. This accusation is unfounded. Unannounced investigations were conducted on January 5, 2007; March 13, 2007; August 9, 2007; and November 15, 2007. MDA inspectors did not find the conditions the complainants reported. MDA records indicate that inspectors found that the cage sizes, food and water levels, and cleanliness at the facility met state requirements.

In the article, Neavling wrote "State inspectors found similar conditions in visits since 2003 but did nothing." Again, this is deceptive. The Department held a hearing in April 2004 with *Pollywood Pets* store due to verified complaints. The Department provided a list of animal health standards for the store to follow. Since 2004, many changes were made by the store, including changes in animal suppliers, a changed vaccination protocol, and a changed cleaning/disinfecting protocol.

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The statement from the former employee of *Pollywood Pets* that she quit her job because the "state did nothing" is contradictory to our records. In response to her phone call on February 22, 2007, two state veterinarians investigated on March 13, 2007. The inspectors listed eight recommendations for the owner to follow; none were based on violations of the law.

Mr. Neavling erroneously wrote that MDA's last inspection of *Family of Pets* in Waterford was five years ago. In actuality, the Department's investigations of *Family of Pets* were conducted on January 13, 2003; December 12, 2003; July 9, 2004; and December 16, 2005. MDA received a complaint on September 4, 2007, that the facility was housing adult dogs in small cages. On a previous inspection, the cages had been approved and were within the guidelines.

And finally, the statement that MDA... "Has never fined or shut down a single metro Detroit pet shop" is untrue. Since 2006, MDA has fined three stores in the metro Detroit area.

In my conversation with Mr. Neavling, he never shared the allegations he was planning to print. If he had, we would have provided the correct information. He did not, and that is unfortunate.

Sincerely,

Steven Halstead, State Veterinarian  
Michigan Department of Agriculture